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Genealogy
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GENEALOGY IN THE LIBRARY.

What is genealogy?

Dr. Henry R. Stiles, an old-time genealogist of long experience, says: "Genealogy is the science of personal identification. It has for its object the discovery and permanent establishment, by proofs and evidences which would be conclusive in any court of law, of the identity of the individual, both in his relations to those who have preceded him and to those who may succeed him in his own particular family line, as well as in his relations to those belonging to collateral lines of the general family of which he and they are members."

Most of you who have had any experience with the amateur seeker after genealogical information will answer that genealogy is an infernal nuisance. And so it is in the hands of some people. There is hardly a subject in the whole realm of human knowledge on which so many senseless questions are asked, foolish statements made, and idiotic letters written.

Almost everybody is, in his own estimation, qualified to do genealogical work if he feels like it. "It is very simple," he says. "You find out who your father was, and then his father, and so on." And this is as far as many of them get before they cease to feel like it. Others persevere, and get back to the Revolution, where they rest satisfied, assuring themselves that this is far enough, and that the rest doesn't amount to anything, anyhow. But there are some who are possessed of a true genealogical instinct, who will follow a trail through the darkest tangles of vital records and archives with the keen scent of a hound, passing cross trails and false leads with a sniff, until finally they pounce upon

their quarry and drag it forth to be worried and torn to pieces by the rest of the jealous pack. These are true genealogists, men and women who do good work, and leave behind them monuments of patience and industry but no money.

Good work in genealogy never was done solely for the money it might bring to the compiler, but the best is brought forth by the genuine enthusiast, who does it because the intricate problems of personal identity have for him a fascination and an excitement which no other occupation on earth can afford. You may say that there are professional genealogists who work for money, and who will not open their lips until their palms are crossed with a green-back. This is true, and most of them do good work, but I venture to say there is not one among their numbers who was not led into genealogy by a love for it as a science rather than by a sole regard for the dollars it might bring to him. The enthusiasm of the professional gives him experience, and experience makes him expert in the knowledge of methods, in judgment of authorities, and in the sources of information. There is a ready demand for his services, so he sells his labor as we do ours, and finds an agreeable way of providing his family with the necessities and comforts of life.

In speaking of genealogy I include all search after ancestors, whether for the purpose of gaining admission into a hereditary society, tracing title to imaginary property in England, personal gratification, or compiling a family history.

When anybody comes to you for help first find out exactly what he wants. If he does not know, and many do not, find out what he does know, and then tell him what

he wants. Some people go to a librarian with such simplicity and trustfulness that it is really affecting. I received a letter one day from a woman somewhere out West, asking for the Revolutionary service of her great-grandfather. She said she did not know his name, nor where he lived, and she was not sure that he was in the Revolution, but she wanted to join the Daughters of the American Revolution. I thought she was giving me very little information as a guide in my search, and looked at the end of the letter to see what her own name was, what family she belonged to, but she had signed her married name.

You will find that many beginners start with strange ideas and extraordinary beliefs of the greatness of their ancestors, although this is not as generally true today as it was a few years ago. We can all remember the time when everybody claimed to be descended from one of three brothers who came to America together. There were more brothers who came to this country in bunches of three than there were old chairs in the Mayflower. It is not, however, a proper part of your duty to attempt to correct these fancies, for by so doing you will quickly find yourself in a very disagreeable and useless controversy, which will destroy your usefulness in the case. Your student will probably be positive and intolerant, but this will simply emphasize his inexperience. As he progresses and develops in his work he will soon be forced to abandon his ideas by finding that his family, as a whole, was made up of plain, ordinary people with, perhaps, an occasional instance of unusual ability, such a family as anybody has a right to expect. He will undoubtedly find some individuals of whom he will not care to boast.

Although strange cases are not as numerous as they once were, they do occasionally appear, and sometimes they amount almost to insanity. A woman called on me one day in great haste for a certified copy of some document which I could not find to exist. She said that it was the last link in her chain of evidence to prove her claim to an estate in England, her share of which was to be eighty million dollars. Finally she found something else which she said would do just as well; but the office of the Secretary of State was closed, and the copy must be certified somehow, so, to please her, I attached the certificate of a notary public, stamped it with my seal, and she went away perfectly satisfied. And I have got to wait for my notary's fee until she gets her eighty millions.

Mr. Collins, hod-carrier, came in another day, and wanted some book that would tell him about the early kings of Ireland. Mr. Collins is one of the very few unconsciously funny Irishmen that I have ever known. He told the tale that once upon a time the kings of Ireland claimed title to the soil of Denmark, but they did not possess the land. Nevertheless, in assertion of their title, it was customary to bestow portions of that country as wedding gifts on their sons and daughters, in the full belief that some day they would again come into actual possession. "They till me I am of ryal blude," said Mr. Collins, and he wanted to find his piece of Denmark.

These are extraordinary cases, and not to be looked for in our every-day library work. But, perhaps, some day a portly, positive woman will come in and say, "I want to find the Revolutionary record of my great-grandfather. He was a colonel in the Revolution." You find no mention of

any such colonel in the Revolutionary rolls, but you may find a corporal or a private of the name she gives you; and you ask: "How do you know he was a colonel? Where did you find your authority?" She immediately bristles up and replies: "Why, we have always been told in our family, right straight down, that he was a colonel. My father told me so when he was ninety-eight years old, and I guess he wouldn't lie. And we know it is so, anyway, because we have got his gun."

Of the treatment of genealogical inquiries there is not much to be said. Naturally you would first look for a published genealogy of the family, or a history of the town in which they were located. If both of these fail, then your client is in difficulty, and must search at large for his information, in original town, church, and family records, wills and deed, biographical sketches, and the whole vast body of published and unpublished material which is now accessible to the student. He must keep his problems always in mind and never despair, for often facts long sought for are found in strange places, to which the most analytical mind in the world would never be led by the most finished process of reasoning.

Only a few days ago a friend in New York, to whom I had sent some notes from our early deeds, wrote me that one of these deeds probably revealed the name of the wife of John Bean of Exeter, a name which the Bean family association had been seeking for years, under the leadership of the late Judge Drummond of Portland, a most accurate and thorough genealogist. I found that my friend was right, and that, not by one deed alone, but by comparing two deeds, I could trace a distinct line from

the ancestor he was seeking back to John Bean, his wife, and his wife's father. None of the Bean family being a party to either of these deeds, the name was not indexed, and neither my friend nor I was particularly interested in Beans unless they were baked. Such purely accidental discoveries occasionally happen, and the student is justified in looking almost anywhere for his facts, for they may be there.

The busy librarian or assistant is obliged to make it a general rule not to conduct genealogical research for his patrons, unless they may choose to leave the matter in his hands, to be done in moments of leisure or after library hours. During the library day it is very unwise to attempt to do more than guide the student, for, if you once become involved, one question leads to another, one generation to the next, until you discover that half your day has been spent, perhaps to little purpose, and your own work stands untouched. Give the amateur student the books that will help him, answer all the questions he may ask, but let him do his own searching. If necessary, show him how to use indexes, and explain to him the plan of sequence used in the genealogies he is consulting, but let him use the books himself. He may prove to be incapable of following a line of ancestry, but, if this be so, the sooner he ceases the attempt the less harm he will do by making untrue records for the use of other members of his family, who, not having the sources of information at hand, may depend on his work as accurate.

In genealogy, errors once in print are propagated to a degree impossible in any other work. All genealogical facts must first come from some original record, which can exist in only one place. Therefore, when

this record is printed, the printed copy is accepted by most people in lieu of the original, for the saving of time and expense involved in a journey to the manuscript. If there is an error in this print it is copied and recopied, and woven into genealogies of allied families until a web of falsity has been created which can never be entirely destroyed. The first and absolutely essential qualification of a genealogist is accuracy, and the second is industry.

It is not now possible for any city or town library in this state to acquire much of a genealogical library. These books are very expensive, and it requires a large number to be effective in supplying the wants of any prospective student who may chance to apply. But if you do have such inquiries there are two or three books which you can have, and which you cannot do without. Munsell's Genealogical Index, the last edition of which was issued in 1900, gives references under each family name to all the genealogy relating to that family which is printed in individual volumes, town and county histories, the New England Historical and Genealogical Register, and a few of the more important genealogical works of a general scope. Munsell's List of Titles in Genealogical Periodicals, 1899, gives a list of genealogical articles published in various periodicals. With these as guides your student can easily select those books which will be of assistance to him, and you can obtain them from the State Library.

Probably the motive of most of the genealogical inquiries you may receive will be the gaining of admission into some hereditary society, and the motive of most of these efforts is purely social or personal. Perhaps I am led to believe in the less worthy motive as inciting people to a study

of their family histories by the fact that in my experience so many of those who come to me for help and advice in beginning such research first ask for information of some ancestor to whom they ascribe some noteworthy deed or some distinguished title. He was a Revolutionary soldier at least, and generally an officer of high rank; or he was a judge, or a councillor, or a governor, as proved by family tradition; and it has fallen to my lot to explode many a good old tale of pride handed down from generation to generation by proving from the records that the colonel was a corporal, or the judge a justice of the peace.

Some people take the other extreme, and scoff at all mention of family history or ancestral dignity, and say that it is only what one does himself that he has any right to be proud of. A friend of mine was one afternoon attending a pink tea, or a sewing circle, or something of that sort, where the matter of family pride was discussed. She expressed her opinion very forcibly to the effect that the whole thing was nonsense, and finished by saying: "Why, I should not feel a bit proud if I found out that I was descended from—er—er—Queen Elizabeth."

So she vindicated her theory that one's reputation is made only by what he does himself. That one saying of hers made her more famous in her city than all the deeds of all her ancestors.

Every family line will include some black sheep, for our ancestors were human, like ourselves, and subject to error. Unless a genealogist is governed by a false pride in the family he is writing, black sheep will receive the same treatment as white, and all facts will be accurately stated, whether good or bad. Any attempt to cover up a

moral obliquity by the changing of a date, or the omission of a date or an essential fact, is a genealogical sin. The mistakes of our forefathers need not be made unduly prominent, and many of them it may not be necessary to mention. But the necessary facts of human life, such as parentage, date and place of birth and death, record of marriage, dates of birth and names of children, if known, cannot rightly be changed or omitted, whether they indicate any deviation from the path of righteousness or not.

Many of the black sheep of two hundred years ago would be quite blonde in our day. If we find our forefathers figuring in the court records of long ago, we should do them the justice to remember that they lived under very different laws and customs from ours, and that many things which now pass unnoticed were then solemnly and severely dealt with by the magistrate. The list of capital crimes was long and strange. In our first code of law in New Hampshire, enacted in 1679-80, idolatry, blasphemy, treason, rebellion, murder, witchcraft, bestiality, and false witness "to take away a man's life" were punishable by death without alternative; and kidnapping, rebellious or stubborn conduct by children sixteen years old or more towards their parents, rape, and arson, by death "or some other grievous punishment." Swearing, lying, destroying of fences, and speaking contemptuously of the Scriptures or of the minister were heavily fined. In the Cranfield code of 1682 it is laid down that "Whosoever shall on the Lord's day be found to do unnecessary servile labour, travell, sport or frequent Ordinaries in time of public worship, or idely straggle abroad; The person so offending shall pay a fine of Ten shillings,

or be set in the stocks an hour. And for discovery of such Offenders, It Is Ordered, That the Constable with some other meet person whom he shall choose, Shall in the time of public worship go forth to any suspected places within their Precincts to find out any offender as above, & when found to return their names to some Justice of the Peace, who shall forthwith send for such Offender, & deal with him according to Law."

Our Sunday afternoon walk was forbidden as idly straggling abroad. What a day Sunday must have been, especially for the children! There were practically no books among the common people except the Bible, and these were so scarce that they were often specially devised in wills, like the feather beds, and the iron pots and brass kettles, the most highly prized articles of all the household furniture and utensils, because, I suppose, they were the most difficult to get. Many of our ancestors had to sign their names by mark, and could not have read books if they had had them. Happily a large part of the Lord's day was taken up by two meetings, with two long sermons, strong ones, too, smelling of fire and brimstone. The minister was generally the only man of book-learning in the town, until later, when the settlements enlarged and comparative wealth increased. Then came the Squire, in most cases a man who had acquired a comfortable property and a fair degree of education for the times.

It sometimes seems as if genealogy were a sort of contagious disease, the germs of which lie dormant in ancient records, and are propagated by the art of the printer; and it often happens that the innocent victim, while satisfying a mere curiosity by looking for some single fact, becomes in-

fect, and soon develops the fever in its most violent form. He never recovers, for the disease is incurable, and it is in this way that the best genealogist is made. He gives to it all his spare moments, and many that he cannot spare. He pursues his own ancestors to the ends of the earth, and then comes back and begins on his wife's. Some live long enough to do both. It depends largely on what kind of a compromise one can make with his conscience, to enable himself to leave some things undone. For, although in theory genealogy is an exact science, in practice it is most variable and imperfect. A complete genealogy of a family never has been written, and never will be. Early records are comparatively meagre, and once written in that way they can never be perfected. It is not until recent years that complete records of births, marriages, and deaths have been kept in any of our towns or states. What of such records we do find we should appreciate as having been kept voluntarily, for the laws on this subject, when any existed, were of little effect. I do not say this to the discredit of the past, for there was abundant reason for neglect. In the first place no system of keeping such records was provided by government. In the second place our ancestors were far too busy with other affairs of greater consequence to their own hard existence to give much time and attention to the keeping of records for the convenience of the future. They were struggling with the forces of nature to wrest a bare subsistence from the soil. They were, here in New Hampshire, pushing new settlements into the west and north, and bringing up large families of children in the wilderness. The land had first to be cleared of the forest,

and the first year corn was planted among the stumps. Later the stumps had to be cut out or burned, and the stones picked up, before a crop of hay could be raised, unless the settler was fortunate enough to own a piece of meadow land. Housed in log huts in the far regions of what are now Cheshire, Sullivan, Grafton, Belknap, Carroll, and Coös counties, buried in snow during the winter, and beset on all sides by wild beasts and still more savage Indians, they could give to the making of records but little of the precious time required by the axe, the plough, and the gun.

Even now our records do not cover the whole field of genealogical inquiry. One of the greatest obstacles to successful genealogy is the difficulty in tracing families in their movements from town to town. This is something which never was a subject of record, and is not today. Our record system would be vastly improved by the enactment of a law requiring that before any person shall remove his residence from a town he shall file with the town clerk a statement of his intention, stating his name, and the names of the members of his family who are to accompany him, the place to which they are going, and the date of removal. The same law should require him to file similar information, on arrival, with the clerk of the town to which he goes, stating the place of his former residence.

The wonderful activity in genealogical research which has prevailed for the last fifteen or twenty years is due, I think, very largely to the hereditary societies, composed of the descendants of those who took part in some of the great events in American history, like the Revolution and the colonial wars, or of those who settled in this country during its earliest years.

These societies were founded, nominally, for the making and preservation of historical and genealogical records, and thereby to foster in the hearts of present and future generations a respect for the flag and a love of country by holding up to them the heroic deeds and motives of their forefathers, and the sufferings and hardships they endured in establishing the government under which we now live.

These societies have, in the aggregate, done an immense amount of valuable work, and deserve far more credit than the public seems willing to allow them. Many people are able to see in them only a manifestation of personal vanity, a desire to prove one's self a little better than his fellow man. This element does certainly exist in a large degree, and probably, if the truth were told, has had a greater influence in the starting of hereditary organizations than the more commendable idea of teaching patriotism to our children by the examples of history. But this should not blind our eyes to the great good which has been accomplished. Few men can be members of the Sons of the American Revolution without learning more of the history of the Revolution than they knew before.

But these societies have their dangers as well as their benefits, and if the idea of heredity is allowed to predominate over the legitimate purposes of these organizations as laid down in their charters, the result can be nothing but disastrous to our social and economic principles. We have no titled class in this country, and we boast that we have no aristocracy but that of money. This is not exactly true. Genealogy has emphasized the idea of heredity, and every community already has its members who view themselves as of a better

class than the others. Their reasons may be blood, money, culture, education, employment, or religion. Our salvation at present is in the fact that these people are not united in one class. The foundation principle of aristocracy abroad is the inheritance of blood from ancestors who were themselves aristocrats. New titles are bestowed on persons of plebeian origin, but a title alone does not admit its owner to the inner circles of the realm, and in many cases it takes generations of patient and persistent effort to secure general recognition of social superiority.

The orders bestowed on favorite or distinguished subjects by the monarchs of Europe are only memberships in certain societies, whose privileges largely consist in the wearing of decorations on public occasions, and the writing of many letters after the recipients' names. We have already adopted the wearing of decorations to a certain degree, and may in time use the initial letters. But we have gone far enough. If the members of these societies lose sight of the genuine historical purpose of their charters, and allow the length of their pedigrees to absorb their ideas and efforts, then we shall lack only the unity of organization to perfect an aristocracy as powerful and dominant as that in any country of the old world.

I began with a definition of genealogy, and I am going to end with one. John A. Vinton, another historian and genealogist of the old school, has given to us a definition and an appreciation of genealogy so beautiful that I cannot resist the opportunity to read it to you.

"Genealogy is the natural outcome of that inherent disposition in man which leads him to seek for and preserve the me-

memorials of his ancestors in connection with those relating to himself. This disposition springs from an immutable necessity of man's existence, since God, as the crowning act of His work of creation, established the family relation, in itself the very corner-stone of all human, social, political, and religious organization. In God's system of creation and government the family relation, which was inaugurated by the primeval marriage of Adam and Eve, was a unit in form, dual as to parentage, germinal as to its nature, being the seed-bud or appointed means for the extension of the human race. It was evidently designed by its divine founder as a normal relation, and as one especially adapted to the wants and welfare of the race. From it arise a thousand social relations, duties, comforts, and delights to benefit and bless mankind. It forms, indeed, the very bed-rock on which all human institutions are founded, without which the world would be a mere chaos of human beings.

"The family as thus instituted by God was a type foreshadowing (1) the school, in the nurture and education of children; (2) the state, in which mature human life develops its powers in multifold relations and ways; and (3) the church, or that condition of spiritual life in which man is brought into intimate relations with his Maker. Through this fourfold warp and woof of family, school, state, and church runs the central principle of obedience to a higher and properly constituted authority, man's first great lesson in life, linking him, as it were, by a golden thread of analogy, both to his Infinite Creator and to his fellow man. The necessity of obedience to a higher and properly constituted authority thus confronts man at the very threshold

of life, in the family. 'Honor thy father and thy mother' is not alone the injunction of the Christian Bible, but is enunciated with equal force in the holy book of all ancient religions. This fifth commandment of the Decalogue, standing foremost in the second table of the law as delivered to Moses, is the analogue and the logical sequence of the first commandment, 'Thou shalt have no other gods beside Me,' which heads the first table, and includes all the moral precepts which follow. For it is evident that the man who does not honor his parents is not, and cannot be, a truly moral man in the highest sense of the term. Our habits of obedience or of disobedience to the law of God begin right here. For our parents, with whom our earliest human relations connect us, stand to us, for a time, in the place of God; and reverence for parents thus becomes an essential element of a sound moral character. Reflecting, then, upon the fact that what our parents are to us their parents were to them, and that what our parents were they owed, under God, to the care they received from the natural guardians of their being, and that the same holds true through all the generations of the past, we are led to the conclusion that the fifth commandment binds us to honor and reverence all our ancestors, so far as known to us, and so far as these ancestors were worthy of such regard."

It is no longer necessary to apologize for genealogy, as it was when this was written, but I think we may accept it as a fair and merited tribute. "He that has no regard for his ancestors does not deserve to be remembered by his posterity."

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